



## CONCEPT NOTE

### ***Going from strength to strength: Building capacity for equitable, effective and sustained participation of civil society organisations in biodiversity conservation in Caribbean islands.***

#### **1. Overview**

***Going from strength to strength*** is a three-year (2008-2010) research and capacity building project, coordinated by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (MacArthur). It builds on the findings of and capacities built under an earlier CANARI projects, notably:

- *Improving governance through civil society involvement in natural resource management in the Caribbean* [2001-2006 funded by EC/Hivos-funded]
- *Developing and disseminating methods for effective biodiversity conservation in the insular Caribbean* [2003-2005 funded by MacArthur]
- CANARI's extensive experience of assisting government agencies and civil society organisations with processes of visioning, strategic planning and organisational development.

***Going from strength to strength*** focuses particularly on the islands of Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti) and Jamaica, with dissemination of lessons learned to a wide range of stakeholders in the other islands of the Caribbean.

#### **2. Problem being addressed**

The livelihoods of Caribbean people are inextricably linked to the natural resources and biodiversity of their islands, notably through agriculture and fishing, tourism and recreation, and long-standing cultural and spiritual practices. There is also a high dependence on natural ecosystems for the provision of critical services such as clean air, water, climate amelioration, and flood and erosion control.

The islands of the Caribbean have also been identified as a global “hotspot” for biodiversity with numerous endemic, rare and threatened or endangered ecosystems and species. Yet recent assessments of biodiversity, such as those undertaken under the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Assessment of the Northern Range of Trinidad; Assessment of the Caribbean Sea), show escalating degradation of both marine and terrestrial resources. This is being directly driven by unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and conversion of natural ecosystems for development. Indirect drivers include growing populations, economic activity that is environmentally unsustainable, and consumption patterns that over-exploit natural resources. Under projected trends and scenarios for Caribbean islands (see <http://www.canari.org/climate.asp>) the ongoing degradation of natural ecosystems is likely to be further exacerbated by higher sea temperatures, sea level rise, and drier summers, notably in the Greater Antilles. Ironically, as the ecosystems providing ecological services and livelihood opportunities continue to be degraded, the pressure further increases to over-exploit and convert the remaining natural areas in the name of ‘development’.

There is therefore an urgent need for the region to develop effective strategies to halt, and where possible reverse, biodiversity degradation before the changes become irrevocable and further diminish sustainable livelihood opportunities. Civil society has a critical role to play in the development and

implementation of such strategies and in increasing public awareness of the implications of loss of biodiversity. Civil society is also increasingly being called upon to play a pivotal role in the development of adaptive strategies in the face of climate change.

Past research by CANARI indicates that key barriers to equitable civil society participation in natural resource management include both the wider institutional framework for governance and the internal capacity of civil society organizations<sup>1</sup> (CSOs), as outlined in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Analysis of key barriers to effective civil society participation in natural resource governance*

<i>Institutional framework / governance issues</i>	<i>CSO capacity issues</i>
<p>a) political and cultural barriers to strategic long-term planning and management for sustainable resource use and the development of sustainable livelihoods;</p> <p>b) outdated, overlapping and ineffective policies, legislation, institutions and practice;</p> <p>c) rigid governance structures that lack adaptability and resilience and exclude many of the key stakeholders;</p> <p>d) limited human and financial resources in government agencies (which are further stretched by demands for compliance and reporting under various multilateral agreements) and a world view and culture that resists collaboration with other partners, including civil society, private sector and other government agencies;</p> <p>e) under-valuing of the civil society capacity that exists;</p> <p>f) absence of or unwillingness to share the data essential to decision-making and failure to optimise the application of both scientific and traditional knowledge.</p>	<p>a) failure to strategically leverage the capacity which exists within the organisation;</p> <p>b) dependence on externally-driven capacity building programmes that are culturally inappropriate and often fail to draw or build on existing capacity;</p> <p>c) limited capacity of civil society organisations to participate in natural resource governance, with the following being the factors most frequently identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of strategic direction;</li> <li>• internal governance issues;</li> <li>• limited availability of human and financial resources;</li> <li>• ineffectiveness of most capacity building initiatives in creating resilient and sustainable organisations and institutions as opposed to strong individuals;</li> <li>• capacity of organisations sometimes depleted rather than built as a result of complex donor and partner requirements, with no apparent analysis of the cost/benefit.</li> </ul> <p>d) failure to capitalise on the collective strength of the CSOs in the region as a result of inadequate or ineffective collaboration between CSOs at the local, national and regional levels.</p>

Although there has been some progress in engaging civil society in natural resource governance (for example through participatory decision-making and co-management arrangements), there are still too few documented Caribbean examples of equitable, effective and sustained participation of CSOs in conservation and too little research on what enables or constrains effective participation of this kind.

A few Caribbean conservation CSOs are thriving but many are still struggling to navigate the transition from volunteer group to professional organisation and/or from adversarial environmental advocacy to more collaborative partnerships with government and the private sector in the management of the resources critical to development. Too many Caribbean CSOs appear mired in a self-reinforcing cycle of lack of strategic direction, shortage of human and financial resources, overdependence on one or a few

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this project, civil society organisations are defined as non-governmental and community-based organisations, whether operating at regional, national or local level.

key individuals, no succession planning, inappropriate governance structures, and rifts between board, staff and members.

### **3. Project approach**

***Going from strength to strength*** seeks to address the barriers outlined above through a process of **participatory research, action learning** and **capacity building** involving a core group of 10 CSOs. Rather than focusing just on the capacity gaps and weaknesses, this approach acknowledges that each participating CSO already has significant strengths on which it can draw, build and share with others in order to strengthen the collective effectiveness of all participating CSOs – and by extension their partners and beneficiaries – to promote and engage in effective biodiversity conservation and management of the region's natural resources. This approach builds on CANARI's experience of facilitating Action Learning Groups (under the *Who Pays for Water* project <http://www.canari.org/alg.htm> and its current Forests and Livelihoods projects). It also draws on feedback from the CSOs that participated in *Improving governance through civil society involvement in natural resource management in the Caribbean*, who all highly valued the opportunities to exchange information and experiences and recommended the institutionalisation of such exchanges in future projects. CANARI's coordination of the Action Research and Learning Group (ARLG) will seek to draw on its own strengths and it will also share the findings of its own processes of self-analysis and identification of capacity gaps.

Participating organisations will be selected based on their existing involvement in some aspect of biodiversity conservation; identified strengths in certain key areas of CSO competency; ability to act as leaders and change agents with a variety of different stakeholders in their countries, communities and sectors; and willingness to commit to a three-year period of self-analysis, open dialogue; cross-learning and capacity building. It is anticipated that at least eight of the groups will be based in Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica. The intention is to have a mix of groups operating at regional, national and community level including several that have experience of active participation in civil society networks. Two representatives from each organisation will be invited to attend the ARLG meetings and the project will provide small grants for capacity building activities at the wider institutional and/or organisational level. In cases where a collective capacity need is identified that cannot be met through cross-learning, this will be addressed through external facilitation and training. Lessons learned from the project, and the tools and methods applied during it, will be widely disseminated to other key conservation actors in government, civil society, private sector and donor organisations.

### **4. Project goal**

Strengthened governance arrangements for effective and sustained biodiversity conservation in the islands of the Caribbean through improved civil society capacity and enabling institutional arrangements.

### **5. Project objectives**

- a) ***to identify the key enabling factors for effective civil society participation in institutions for biodiversity conservation in Caribbean islands through the analysis of a range of participatory biodiversity conservation governance arrangements***, including a review of :
- the roles played by CSOs in biodiversity conservation;
  - which biodiversity conservation governance arrangements work and why;
  - the key factors in existing institutional arrangements that facilitate or hinder effective civil society participation in governance;
  - the interactions between the different elements (e.g. people, policies, legislation) in these complex governance systems;
  - the capacity that CSOs need in order to contribute to effective biodiversity conservation in the islands of the Caribbean;
  - the most effective strategies, tools and methods for civil society capacity building.

**b) to learn from and enhance the capacity of 10 Caribbean CSOs to effectively promote and participate in biodiversity conservation through:**

- implementation of an innovative **Action Research and Learning Group** (ARLG) programme of cross-learning, information sharing, training, networking and case studies designed to draw and build on the existing capacity within the group;
- identification of priority capacity needs that require external facilitation and development of a programme of capacity building activities to address these;
- development of fundraising strategies for both CANARI and the CSO participants to complement and augment activities under this project;
- development of a framework for participatory monitoring and evaluation of initiatives designed to build the capacity of CSOs to participate in biodiversity conservation governance.

**c) to influence the policies and practice in government agencies, civil society organisations private sector companies and donor agencies to enhance civil society participation in institutions engaged in biodiversity conservation through:**

- dissemination of lessons learned and innovative tools and methods from the project in a range of formats such as case studies, policy briefs, newsletters and guidelines via print and audiovisual media;
- building the capacity of 10 CSOs to act as catalysts, change agents and facilitators for wider dissemination of lessons, tools and methods to the government agencies, donor agencies, private sector and other CSOs within their networks and institutions;
- design and facilitation of regional, national and local training programmes and seminars on the tools and methods identified through the project, by CANARI, other participating CSOs and specialist consultants;
- delivery of presentations at regional and international events by participating CSOs in the ARLG.

## **6. Project results**

The project will be working towards contributing to changing the following behaviours and the structure and function of institutions for biodiversity conservation in Caribbean islands:

- CSOs effectively and equitably participating in institutions for biodiversity conservation;
- CSOs engaged in directing, monitoring and evaluating their own capacity building;
- CSOs collaborating with each other and their partners in government, academia, the private sector and the media to share information and to help each other build capacity;
- A core group of CSOs acting as leaders and change agents at regional, national and local level to promote effective tools and methods for capacity building of CSOs.

## **7. Guiding research questions**

The following guiding research questions will be refined with the participating CSOs at the first ARLG meeting and in consultation with partner agencies involved in complementary initiatives:

- What are the barriers to and enabling factors for effective self-organisation of Caribbean CSOs involved in biodiversity conservation?
- How can CSOs effectively monitor and evaluate their own strategic development?
- Can all CSOs realistically become self sustaining? What other financing mechanisms exist?
- What tools and methods work best for building the necessary capacity in such CSOs in the Caribbean?
- What mechanisms can be developed and stimulated to sustain effective cross-learning between CSOs in the Caribbean?

- How do CSOs function within conservation institutions? Can complex system theory help us understand this?
- How do civil society networks function at local, national and regional levels in conservation and how is capacity built in a network? Can networks function more effectively?
- What role(s) are CSOs best fitted to play in promoting conservation and sustainable development in Caribbean islands at the start of the 21st century?
- What enabling framework (policies, structures, processes) is needed to facilitate and optimise this role?

## **8. Project activities**

The core project activities comprise:

- a. Creation and coordination of a civil society **Action Research and Learning Group (ARLG)**
- b. At least four 4-5 day **ARLG meetings**, including a field/study/study visit component and formal capacity building activities, rotated between participants' countries, with two members of each participating CSO being invited to attend each ARLG meeting;
- c. **Case studies** both specifically under this project and from complementary CANARI projects (see list in Appendix 1, to be refined at the first ARLG meeting).
- d. **Small grants** of approximately \$5,000 – 10,000: provision for each CSO in the ARLG to access a small grant for some aspect of building its capacity or that of its institution or network. This could include formal training programmes, strategic planning, organisational or programme evaluation, study tours. **A small grant mentoring and monitoring team** will be also be established, coordinated by CANARI.
- e. **Dissemination of project learning and capacity building:** communication strategy to be developed at first ARLG meeting but to include:
  - mechanisms for **intra-ARLG communications** between meetings (e.g. intranet, newsletters, email listserv) ;
  - **Going from strength to strength web page** on CANARI's web site with links to ARLG member sites;
  - **training programmes:** at least four training modules including a "training of trainers" component;
  - **print and audiovisual materials**, where possible in English, French and Spanish;
  - **presentations by ARLG members**, including CANARI, at local, national, regional and international events and within the national and regional institutions of which they are part.
- f. **Participatory monitoring and evaluation** throughout the course of the project including the development of an appropriate framework and the development of participants' capacity for monitoring and evaluation of their own organisations, institutions and projects. External independent consultants will contribute to the final evaluation of the project, with the results being made available to inform the development of the programmes of CANARI, ARLG members and other key partners, including donor agencies.

## APPENDIX 1

In addition to short case studies of initiatives in which ARLG members are involved, which will be documented as part of the ARLG field/study visits, some additional substantive case studies have been identified under other CANARI projects that can contribute to the project learning, such as:

- an analysis of the impact on organisational capacity of Action Learning Projects being conducted under an FAO-funded Forests and Livelihoods project;
- 4-6 case studies analysing different typologies of forest management governance arrangements with a view to producing recommendations regarding institutional arrangements for forest management that optimise socio-economic benefits for the rural poor (EU-funded Forests and Livelihoods project)
- an analysis of civil society networks involved in the management of fisheries and other marine resources in Trinidad and Tobago (IDRC-funded MarGov project in collaboration with University of the West Indies Cave Hill Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies).

Two additional case studies will be funded under ***Going from strength to strength*** and the following have been identified as potential candidates:

- a case study of CANARI from its inception in the 1980s to the present time, with particular focus on its adaptive management, governance structures and succession planning to extract lessons on developing sustainable organisations;
- analysis of the impacts of programmes designed to build CSO capacity to determine the most effective strategies, tools and methods for civil society capacity building;
- analysis of the impact on the capacity of CSOs in Grenada of the large injection of funding following Hurricane Ivan to extract lessons on effective donor support for CSOs in general and in post-disaster situations specifically;
- survey and analysis of innovative financing mechanisms in Caribbean conservation CSOs, including endowment funds, fund development and entrepreneurial initiatives to extract lessons on developing financially sustainable CSOs;
- a case study of selected corporate social responsibility programmes in the Caribbean to extract lessons on the role of the private sector in building capacity of CSOs for biodiversity conservation.

All case studies will be published in English, with provision in the ***Going from strength to strength*** budget for two major case studies to be translated by a professional into Spanish and French. Additional funding will be sought to translate the remainder. It is also hoped that ARLG members will take the initiative to produce and/or translate the shorter case studies emanating from the ARLG study visits into their own language. All case studies will be available electronically on CANARI's website, again with provision for the printing of the two main case studies selected. Where appropriate, additional funding will be sought to document case studies in audiovisual formats.